THE FAITHFUL RECOUNT OF A PERSON BORN BEFORE 1990 TRYING TO GET A COFFEE AT A 2025 STARBUCKS

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Man: “A coffee please.”
(Card already in hand, living under the naïve illusion this will be over in thirty seconds.)

Barista: “Which coffee, sir?”

Man: “Oh, just black, please.”

Barista: “Tall?”

Man: “We’re not allowed to make jokes like that anymore. I mean a black coffee, not an African-American person.”

Barista: “No, sir, a *Tall* coffee.”

Man: “Oh, do I have to say it the Australian way? Long black, please.”

Barista: "No sir. Tall, Venti, or Grande?"

Man: "Venti? No, not twenty. It's just me."

Barista: "It's the *size*, sir. Tall, Venti, or Grande?"

Man: "Well, Grande then. That actually means big, not large, but—never mind. Grande, black, please." (Card still in hand. Card beginning to sweat in palm.)

Barista: "Any particular type of coffee, sir?"

Man: "Not really, thanks." (Card now flapping in hand like a distress signal.)

Barista: "For only $1.99 we have special blends. (Points at menu on the wall) The one from Costa Rica has notes of caramel and—"

Man: "Oh, come on, don't read them all—"

Barista: "—the one from Guatemala is a dark roast, but our Ethiopian blend is— Costa Rica has notes of caramel, Guatemala is a dark roast…"

Time slowed.

"…Ethiopian blend is floral, Sumatra has a smoky body…"

He pointed (using the card) to the coffee already made behind the counter: "That. Just. That" (and slammed the card on the cash machine)

"So… a grande, black, standard mix.". She tapped the screen. "That will be… the budget of the state of Connecticut, please."

Cut to:
Same man, 14 minutes later, sitting in a diner booth. Hands trembling. Eyes haunted.

It's been—at most—fifteen seconds since he sat down when a waitress appears, pours coffee into a

plain white mug without a single question, and says: "You call me when you're ready to order, honey."

He breaks. Tears roll down his cheeks.
He takes her hand, presses it to his face.
"Thank you… thank you…"

She pats his head. Knowingly.
She's seen this before.

MEANWHILE, IN ITALY

A man steps into a bar. The air smells of ground beans and last night's gossip.

Customer: "Buongiorno, un caffè per favore."

Barista: "Ma certo, subito."

No questions. No forms. No interrogation about roast profiles, mouthfeel, or spiritual beliefs. Within **23 seconds**, there it is: a *caffè*. Which in Italy means espresso—always espresso. Served in an elegant but unpretentious small ceramic cup,

creamy on top, hot enough to warn you it's alive. No venti, no grande, no tall. No other kind has ever been conceived.

He sips. It's perfect. Short, delicious, and gone before a corporate marketing department could have invented a loyalty card.

He places a €1 coin on the counter. Receives €0.20 back.
Customer: "Grazie, buongiorno."
Barista: "Anche a lei, arrivederci."

The entire operation—start to finish—takes **less than 50 seconds**.
The make-you-feel-at-home kindness? On the house. Because it's Italy. Not corporate.